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Testimony on Building Needs for
Kansas Health and Environmental Laboratories
presented to
Senate Ways and Means Committee

by

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Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) appreciates this opportunity to present the results of the needs assessment and programming regarding the laboratory facility for the Office of Laboratory Services otherwise known as Kansas Health and Environmental Laboratories (KHEL).

The laboratories provide approximately one million clinical and environmental test results each year to protect the citizens of Kansas. These tests include testing the public water supplies across Kansas, newborn screening for all infants born in Kansas, and breath alcohol testing devices for our state's law enforcement officers. In addition, the laboratories maintain readiness to respond to biological or chemical terrorist attacks, new infectious diseases or any sort of infectious or foodborne outbreak. Finally, the laboratories promote safety and best practices in clinical and environmental testing facilities across Kansas through our certification process.

In March of 2019, KDHE presented a request to the Joint Committee on State Building and Construction and Governor Kelly to evaluate the facility and infrastructure needs for the ongoing work of KHEL. The goal was to evaluate laboratory space KHEL currently occupies at Forbes Field as well as 3 possible site locations for a new standalone facility. After a competitive bid process, the "programming" contract was awarded to Clark Enersen, who has spent the past 6-8 months looking at current space/workflow, future space needs, energy, technology and infrastructure required to provide a safe and efficient workplace for the laboratory staff that serve the citizens of Kansas. Clark Enersen also contracted with the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) for an independent needs assessment of the current facility.

The building KHEL occupies is a 1950s era military hospital that was renovated in the mid-1970s to house the laboratories of KDHE. Many of the infrastructure systems in the lab today are from either the original building or were added in the renovation. The layout of the building is inefficient in both energy usage and workflow and some structural components are becoming unsafe or unrepairable. These issues also contribute to higher employee turnover and more difficulty in recruiting well qualified scientists to work there.

Both APHL and Clark Enersen concluded that the current building is not adequate for a laboratory facility and it was not feasible to renovate it adequately to meet those needs. Concerns were raised about available power and data transfer for equipment, inadequate or antiquated ventilation/heating/cooling systems, no room or provision for modern safety measures to protect employees and the facility (such as staging areas for all hazards type of samples, shower facilities for the highly infectious testing unit). Some of these issues also contribute to the scientists having to work around potential interferences in the testing protocols such as uncontrolled humidity,

temperature and independent power circuits. Finally, it was noted by both teams that the current location is not ideal for the laboratory facility since it is so far away from key clients and other agency staff.

The executive summary of Clark Enersen's programming document and the APHL report have been provided to you along with a one-page summary of the work that KHEL performs and the problems currently facing the laboratory from a facility standpoint. The full report Clark Enersen produced has been provided electronically for the committee and will be published on the KDHE website at www.kdheks.gov/media The work that these reports represent has been critical in evaluating the options for a standalone facility as well as what would be needed should there be an opportunity to integrate the laboratories into an existing building renovation project.

In summary, the current facility is inadequate to support the Kansas Health and Environmental Laboratories. To ensure state employee safety, recruitment and retention of trained scientists and reduce operating and repair costs, a new facility is needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this overview for the committee. I am happy to answer questions as part of our question and answer session.